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Statement submitted by Pakistan Lions Youth Council Khanewal and Peace Foundation Pakistan, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Statement

Social protection with gender justice is a question mark for policy makers and development promoters in Pakistan, every new government, comes with manifesto of gender friendly budgets and social protection on equity basis. Previous ruling parties also tried to provide social protection, but due to unknown reasons, they did not do. Pakistan is a developing country and most of its population lives in undesirable circumstances. A large number of people in the country do not have a proper place to live, this miserable condition has given birth to a large number of beggars and needy people to survive on the charities. The economic condition of an average individual is not encouraging. Poverty, hunger and unemployment have afflicted a large section of female population. Income-earning opportunities are few and far for the poor women of both rural and urban areas. Employment opportunities are scarce and real earnings have declined. Majority of poor women also lack all of the basic human, physical and productive assets and have limited or no access to essential social services. Pakistan has in place social protection mechanisms which are in urgent need of reform. These mechanisms limited coverage approximately 10-13 per cent of population, whereas poverty ratio is 37 per cent. Male have more numbers than females. Speaking percentage-wise, men form 51 per cent, women 48.76 per cent and transgender 0.24 per cent of the total population of Pakistan. Women were in agriculture work is 72.9 per cent in 2000 and increased to 73.1 per cent in 2017, male agriculture workers were 44.5 in 2000 and decreased to 33.9 in 2017. Female workers in Pakistan have a large number of poor and vulnerable, women are exposed to risks like natural disasters, ill health and unemployment. Women and girls usually suffer in all situations. In case of her husband's unemployed or ill, women suffer more than male in different cases. It has been observed that laws and policies to address discrimination, economic disadvantages and violence against women at the community level is the largely patriarchal structure that governs the community and households in much of Pakistan. As such, women and girls have restricted mobility, access to education, access to health facilities, and lower decision-making power, and experience higher rates of violence. These factors are not covered in social security and protection mechanisms. Thus, vulnerability in women sector increases.

It is fact that, what much funds will be available, so much people will get benefit, but here is reverse situation in Pakistan, women are fewer beneficiaries in all fronts. On the contrary, they are suffering more. In case of husband's unemployment or death, she has to suffer to more. All social protections policies from 1967, till now have gaps, they include women on receiver ends, schemes have provisions to provide money to women. Protection is more than money, it should be on equity basis. The social protection mechanisms in place for the poor include Zakat, Baitul Mal, citizen's damage compensation. labour market program and Benazir Income Support Program. For public and private employees, there exist social protection and assistance programs at the federal and provincial levels. Most of the programs are marred by operational inefficiencies, which adversely affect the desired results. are silent to provide social protection on gender base.

Looking at the poor status of women in Pakistani society, it's hard to imagine that Pakistan has been a signatory to any major international agreements on women's empowerment. Pakistani social protection system comprises three types of schemes, social security/social insurance (old age benefits, the pension and workers welfare fund respectively), social assistance for the poor (e.g. zakat, Benazir Income Support Program and labour market program (public works program. These schemes include Qarz-e-Hasna (Micro interest-free loans), Small Business Loans, Youth Training, Skills Development, Provision of laptops, and reimbursement of tuition fee of students from the less developed areas.

According to the International Labour Organization, Social Protection Report 2017-2019 Pakistan spends a measly 0.2 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product on social protection. The coverage for social protection in Pakistan is just 2.3 per cent of the total population of older persons, compared to 24.1 per cent in India; 25.2 per cent in Sri Lanka; 33.4 per cent in Bangladesh and 62.5 per cent in Nepal. This stark contrast with neighbouring and regional countries shows a deep flaw in the socioeconomic policies.

Though Pakistan started off with the rights-based approach for social protection and put in place the contributory schemes for employees' benefits and old-age pension, over the decades, the social protection policy has completely veered towards assistance to the marginalized through non-contributory, tax-financed benefits. Owing to the low spending, there is a lack of awareness about existence and availability of social protection program, Moreover, the procedural complexity makes it difficult for the vulnerable groups, including women and workers employed in informal sector, to access unemployment, health, or education-related benefits because they are not 'poor enough' to qualify for social assistance. This 'missing middle' is at a higher risk of falling into poverty in case they suffer from an economic, health or environmental shock.

The new federal government has hinted towards taking a multi-pronged approach for fighting poverty. It aims to reduce the incidence of poverty through generating jobs under the infrastructure development programs. The private sector will be encouraged to launch labour intensive ventures. In order to ensure food security, the government intends to support prices for staple food items while seeking parliamentary approval by adding a new article about 'Right to Food' in the Constitution. That is why we suggest following recommendation in this wide forum.

Recommendations:

- The social insurance and assistance programs should demonstrate flexibility and respond to the needs faced by women on equity basis.
- The social protection programs only benefit government employees. They should be comprehensively expanded to cover the unprotected vulnerable groups as women and house-based women workers,
- Social insurance programs accrue benefits disproportionately to male population and the non-poor. For not having access to social insurance programs, poor, disabled and disadvantaged, especially those in informal sectors, receive lesser benefits.
- Labour market programs are not a priority in the country. This negligence is adding to the already rising youth unemployment, critical skills gaps and hindering a large number of women from entering into the formal labour market.
- Through innovative initiatives, including employment guarantee schemes and construction of basic infrastructure that can spur local area growth, social protection program scan be used to mitigate rising underemployment. Sustainable employment opportunities can in fact lessen the long-term burden on the government budget allocated for social protection. Equally important is to realize that public sector cannot continue to finance such schemes. Ultimately, local area growth should attract private investment.
- Social protection and social assistance programs should be integrated and target oriented. These should enhance people's capacities to cope with financial shocks, natural and man-made disasters. This requires a stringent and effective monitoring system at federal and sub-national levels. The managers of social

protection programs should be asked to demonstrate results-based management with clear key performance indicators.

- Social protection programs should also have a 'vulnerability preventive' angle instead of focusing only on lending help to the already poor. This can be done through micro insurance schemes. Such schemes can particularly be useful in mitigating the impact of variable
- Existing social protection programs are overlapping and thinly distributed. Expanding protection coverage requires from the state to mobilize additional resources through widening the tax base, improving tax administration and by improving public expenditure management. At the same time, the multiplicity of programs for the same targeted population can be addressed through improved coordination between the federal and provincial governments.
- The government collects substantial amount of money in Zakat, Bait ul Mal and private sector contributions. It is important that public sector funds management should be reformed on corporate lines. A large part of these funds has recently faced depreciation in its real value for not being invested in risk-free assets.
- Finally, the grievance redressal mechanisms are weak across most of the social protection programs. There are decent examples, including disaster management authorities, Rescue 1122 and some initiatives under Benazir Income Support Program, which exhibit good models for addressing people's grievances. It is expected that these examples will be replicated across other social protection programs as well.